On this day - July 28th 1996 - there was a massacre under this mango tree in a small village called Parabongo in northern Uganda. The rebels of The Lord’s Resistance Army came, murdered 22 people and abducted dozens more.

Every time we stand under the mango tree, we think about them. Today we stand with them as they gather at this memorial to remember the 22 men and boys who were killed that day.

They asked me to share this, and the memorandum, below with the world and so I am. It is quite difficult to read, so I have typed the first page:

It’s a common say by people that "forget the past, and concentrate on now and plan for future". The past of 28/7/1996 cannot be forgotten by we the group members of "Too Pe Yero" and the people of Lamogi at large. This is because of the great activity performed by the L.R.A at Parabongo P7 School. That left 22 of our useful people dead at the school compound, the day was so miserable. Blood of our sons/brothers/parents/teachers flow from the mango tree where they were killed up to the school borehole about 120 meters. Our tears ran from the eye up to our toe, we were seriously setting because of the sorrows we had for the soul of our people killed.
May the Almighty God put their souls in eternal peace.
Amen.

Our people killed by the LRA were still children, energetic and full of hope. Their death created a very big hole and a lot of suffering is being left to us. This problem is now being in the following forms:
- Suffering widows
- Vulnerable orphans
- Clients of DRCWA
- School dropout
- Children left alone without aid to accommodate them
- Family members with signs of trauma
- And the more symptoms that one can mention we were keeping a watchful eye on those problems. As a result, we have formed a group called 'Paraedagi LRA' where we shall be organizing memorial services and payer yearly on the 24th of July. And we shall also be reminding our fellow LRA members of the problems they have left behind them on us and their relatives. Amongst the key ones that we shall never forget are:
  - Education of their children
  - Social well-being of their family members.

We are now appealing to the government officials, local leaders, religious leaders, cultural leaders, etc to come and join us in helping the people who died the unwanted death.

NB: During the twenty years of war in the north, many were working in Lagoni, South Sudan, but none of the family members of those people had been selected to benefit either from sponsorship or bursary scheme. This is quite painful.

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Trustee visit in March 2016  
(Written by Penny Peters in April 2016)

We met a lot of different groups, all of the groups have different sets of challenges and have come together for different reasons. Before Seeds came along these people were individuals suffering alone. The first step to becoming a Seeds farmer is to work as a group – one of Alison’s great skills is to be able to identify a type of problem, sorry challenge (Alison won’t allow me to use the word problem and she is quite right), she then empowers them to go out and make friends with other people in a similar situation and ultimately form a group. As a group they are much stronger and can support and counsel one another.

Alison arranged for our first meeting to be with the LRA survivors group – I can see now that she did this to help us understand why there is such grinding poverty and despair in the area. The format of each meeting is similar, the Seeds for Development team are seated on chairs at the front, sometimes with desks. The parish dignitaries/group leaders sit on chairs to one side and the group members sit on the floor in front of us. Andrew and I were the special guests and in most cases the 2nd and 3rd white people they’d ever seen (Alison being the 1st but they’d seen her lots of times before). The meetings were fairly formal they started with a prayer, then we the visitors stood up and introduced ourselves, the leaders then introduced the group, explained why the group had been formed and gave a report of the current situation. Group members were then invited to stand up and tell us their stories.

The LRA survivors are a group of people whose family had been massacred in front of them underneath the mango tree (bottom left photo) by the LRA on 28 July 1996. Those who survived, mainly children, were abducted and made to be rebel soldiers or sex slaves. Most of them are left single and suffer from PTSD, they have no family members left to help them. They are in a much better situation now that they support each other and the farming has given them an income to support themselves. However, they told us about some of the elderly people who are frail and weak and have no family support, this is a challenge that we took forward with us. On our travels we informed people of this situation and asked them to make a point of visiting and helping these people. We went to visit one frail old lady in her home as she was too weak to come to us. On our way to her we went to pay our respects to those who had been massacred, by visiting a memorial that had been erected next to the mango tree (this was something Seeds was going to help fund but we were pleased to find that it had recently been funded by the US AID justice and reconciliation programme).

The people, the memorial and the mango tree when we visited in March 2016
Message to the people of Parabongo on the 21st Anniversary of the Massacre  
(Written by Alison Hall, delivered by Helen Sutton in Parabongo on 28 July 2017)

“Hello everyone, this is Alison from Seeds for Development sending you this message from the UK. I am sorry that I cannot be with you in person on this very sad and special day, but Helen and Tim are here to pass on my message to you, for which I am grateful.

I first came to Parabongo in September 2008, when you were all still living in the camps. I met Devon and the farmers of Gum Pe Loke at the small church, which is no longer there. I call that church "my church" and try and visit the site where it stood, when I can, during my visits. It always reminds me of where I started my journey in your beautiful corner of this earth. In fact, I was very naughty and took a little piece of it home with me and, to this day, I keep it in my bag or pocket. That is because I think of you all every day.

On that first visit, where I also visited Olwal, you told me how the Acholi people work hard and would not let me down. Over the years I have started to have a little understanding about your culture and traditions, which are very different to our lives in the UK! You Acholi people, work together and put family and people first. In the UK, we put money and ourselves first. Your way is better and I am grateful that I come here often and learn your ways of life. Do you know that since 2008, I have visited here more than 20 times. In fact I think it is around 25! I promised on that first visit that I would come back and now I hope you believe me when I say that I am not going anywhere, as you are firmly in my heart and I cannot imagine a year going by or a visit to Uganda when I don’t come right here.

Over the years hundreds of you have received seeds from Seeds for Development, so you can work together in groups to improve your lives through farming as a business. You must continue to do this and work together as a community.

In 2010 I met James Okumu who educated me on the importance of education and making sure that our children have the best start in life. From that initial conversation came your nursery school Vision Hope. Thank you James for working so hard to bring nursery education to the community. I love the slogan of your school – “Building the community we want to be”. I know that one small nursery school will not build a community as big as yours, but if you all work together it will make a big difference and by working together, other nursery schools can be built across the sub-county and the whole region, transforming the lives of your children and grandchildren.

It is impossible for us in the UK and the rest of the world, to imagine what you went through during the war and on that awful day in 1996. Your courage, strength and dignity is unbelievable and an example to the world.

I met Daniel a couple of months ago and learned about today’s memorial ceremony and the book you are creating to make sure that the events of July 28th 1996 are never forgotten. This is a brilliant idea and one that we want to support. Tim and Helen will bring some copies back to the UK and we will promote the book and work hard to make sure the world never forgets what happened here under the mango tree.

Seeds for Development is a very small NGO with very little money – every shilling counts! We work very hard to share your stories and raise funds to help you improve your lives. Every day kind donors give us money to support you with our projects. And now, we even have visitors like Tim and Helen who are coming to visit you with their own projects to help you.

Please continue to work together, as you always tell me you will. Please support one another and especially those who are working hard to bring change to your community from within. Please work hard to improve your lives yourselves. We are all responsible for our own future and success. Sometimes I have seen and heard people being angry and jealous about other people’s success, or thinking that other people are benefitting from things when they aren’t. Please don’t think that and please stop others when you hear it. These negative thoughts are not good!

Today I stand with you as you remember the men and boys who were killed on that terrible day in 1996 and I will continue to stand with you every day. We will work and stand together to build the community you want to be.

Afwoyo  
(Thank you)”